

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 MCT-01
COME-00 ACDA-07 SAJ-01 TRSE-00 CU-02 EB-08 SIL-01
LAB-04 /082 W

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R 251559Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2980
INFO AMCONSUL FLORENCE
AMCONSUL MILAN
AMCONSUL NAPLES

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PINS, IT
SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT TAKES MEASURES AS VIOLENCE CONTINUES

1. SUMMARY. ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 18, THE ANDREOTTI GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED DECREE LAWS TO CONTROL CRIMINAL USE OF WEAPONS AND ELIMINATE TERRORIST HIDE-OUTS. DIVISIONS WITHIN DC PREVENTED AGREEMENT ON A PROPOSAL FOR REFORM AND DEMILITARIZATION OF THE POLICE. IN RESPONSE, INTERIOR MINISTER COSSIGA ANNOUNCED SOME IMMEDIATE TECHNICAL MEASURES AND MORE NEW PROPOSALS FOR LEGISLATIVE ACTION. AS THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON PUBLIC ORDER BEGAN, COSSIGA ACKNOWLEDGED THAT AMPLE REASON FOR DISCONTENT AMONG YOUTH EXISTS, BUT CONDEMNED RECOURSE TO VIOLENCE SUCH AS TOOK PLACE AT UNIVERSITY OF ROME. PCI SUPPORTS GENERAL GOVERNMENT APPROACH TO PROBLEM OF VIOLENCE, BUT DEMANDS IMMEDIATE REFORM OF POLICE. EMBASSY STATISTICS COLLECTED FROM NEWSPAPERS INDICATE THAT VIOLENCE LEVEL IS UP AGAIN AFTER JANUARY PAUSE. WITH NEW LAWS AND RECENT SUCCESSES OF LAW-AND-ORDER FORCES, THE ANDREOTTI GOVERNMENT SEEMS TO BE REACTING MORE EFFECTIVELY TO EMERGENCY CRIME SITUATIONS. END SUMMARY.

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2. GOVERNMENT LEGISLATIVE DRAFTS. THE FEBRUARY 18 CABINET MEETING PRODUCED FIVE DECREE LAWS. THE MOST IMPORTANT PROVIDES FOR IMMEDIATE TRIALS FOR THOSE ARRESTED IN POSSESSION OF ARMS. THE SAME MEASURES AUTHORIZE THE CONFISCATION OF PREMISES OCCUPIED BY ASSOCIATIONS OR OTHER GROUPS WHEREVER ARMS OR EXPLOSIVES ARE FOUND. THIS ENABLES POLICE TO STRIKE PREVENTIVELY AGAINST TERRORIST HIDEOUTS.

THE OTHER FOUR LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS PROVIDE FOR STRICTER ADMINISTRATION OF PRISON FURLOUGHS, SPEEDIER TRIALS, INCREASE OF PRISON STAFFS AND CHANGES IN THE FUNCTIONS OF JUDICIAL EMPLOYEES.

3. NO AGREEMENT ON POLICE REFORM. THE SAME CABINET MEETING POSTPONED ACTION ON THE PROPOSAL TO REFORM AND DEMILITARIZE THE POLICE. MINISTER COSSIGA IS FAVORABLE TO THE DEMILITARIZATION OF THE POLICE FORCES AND TO GRANTING THE RIGHT OF UNIONIZATION (BUT NOT THE RIGHT TO STRIKE) TO THE POLICE (SEE ROME 2620). THIS POSITION HAS ENCOUNTERED STRONG RESISTANCE WITHIN THE DC. NUMEROUS DC DEPUTIES AND PARTY LEADERS LIKE INDUSTRY MINISTER DONAT CATTIN AND FOREIGN MINISTER FORLANI EXPRESSED STRONG OPPOSITION TO THE REFORM. EVEN SOME OF COSSIGA'S ASSOCIATES HAVE RESERVATIONS ABOUT PROCEEDING WITH THE REFORM. A NEWSPAPER REPORT THAT THE DC MAY AGREE ON A COMPROMISE PROPOSAL FOR DEMILITARIZATION WHICH WOULD PERMIT A POLICE UNION NOT AFFILIATED WITH THE CGIL-CISL-UIL AND WOULD DENY POLICE THE RIGHT TO STRIKE.

4. WEEKEND VIOLENCE. UNFORTUNATELY FOR THE GOVERNMENT, VIOLENCE DID NOT PAUSE AFTER ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE NEW MEASURES. ANOTHER POLICEMAN PERFORMING DUTIES AT A ROADBLOCK WAS KILLED BY A BANDIT; A SECOND AGENT WAS GRAVELY WOUNDED. A GROUP OF PRISONERS BROKE OUT OF A PENITENTIARY AND ONE OF THE ESCAPEES HELD A FAMILY HOSTAGE FOR HOURS. MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR COSSIGA REACTED SWIFTLY. HE ANNOUNCED THAT POLICE AT ROADBLOCKS WOULD PLACE METAL STRIPS WITH NAILS ON ROADS TO PREVENT THE BREAKING OF ROADBLOCKS. HE ALSO SAID THAT HE WOULD PRESENT TO THE NEXT CABINET MEETING PROPOSALS TO LIMIT THE CONCESSION OF BAIL, FOR IMMEDIATE TRIALS, FOR THOSE COMMITTING CRIMES AGAINST POLICE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AND LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS, AND FOR THE PROVISION OF BULLET-PROOF VESTS AND BETTER WEAPONS TO THE POLICE.

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5. PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE. THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES DEBATE ON PUBLIC ORDER OPENED FEB. 22 IN AN ATMOSPHERE STILL CHARGED WITH FALLOUT FROM THE EVENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ROME ON FEB. 17 (SEE ROME 2721 AND 2756). DURING A FEB. 20 PRESS CONFERENCE, CGIL LEADER LUCIANO LAMA (PCI), THE OBJECT OF THE LEFT EXTREMISTS' VIOLENCE, HAD COMMENTED BITTERLY THAT IT WOULD BE BETTER FOR MANY OF TODAY'S STUDENTS TO LEAVE THE UNIVERSITY AND LEARN MANUAL TRADES. THIS, ALONG WITH RECENT PCI ADVOCACY OF TOUGH LAW-AND-ORDER MEASURES, WILL PROBABLY CONTRIBUTE TO GROWING YOUTH DISILLUSIONMENT WITH THE PCI. IN PRESENTING THE GOVERNMENT'S CASE TO THE PARLIAMENT, MINISTER COSSIGA DEPLORED VIOLENCE IN ANY FORM, BUT EMPHASIZED THAT ACTS OF VIOLENCE MUST NOT DIVERT ATTENTION FROM BASIC SOCIETAL ILLS WHICH GIVE RISE TO THE VIOLENCE. HE WENT ON TO DEFEND THE CONDUCT OF UNION LEADER LAMA AND OF THE RECTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY DURING THE RECENT DISTURBANCES. HE REJECTED SUGGESTIONS THAT THE UNION CROWD MARSHALS (SERVIZIO D'ORDINE) HAD PROVOKED THE VIOLENCE. REACTION TO COSSIGA'S PRESENTATION WAS MIXED. HE WAS BOTH ATTACKED AND DEFENDED WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY, THE DC. COMMUNIST AND REPUBLICAN SPOKESMEN WERE MIDLY FAVORABLE, WHILE LIBERALS AND SOCIAL DEMOCRATS CRITICIZED

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THE GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO DEFUSE THE UNIVERSITY SITUATION BEFORE IT EXPLODED.

6. TRENDS IN VIOLENCE. THE EMBASSY CONTINUES TO MONITOR POLITICALLY-RELATED VIOLENCE AS REPORTED BY NEWSPAPER AND WIRE SERVICE. THE NUMBER OF INCIDENTS REPORTED DECLINED TO 39 IN THE FIRST HALF OF JANUARY AND 37 IN THE SECOND HALF. DURING THE PERIOD FEBRUARY 1-15, HOWEVER, THE INCIDENTS ROSE TO 58, WHICH ALMOST MATCHED THE PREVIOUS HIGH OF 62 OBSERVED DURING THE FIRST HALF OF DECEMBER 1976. THE MOST IMPORTANT TREND IN VIOLENCE IS THE INCREASING CONCENTRATION UPON BUSINESSES, INDUSTRY, GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS. GROWING NUMBERS OF INCIDENTS ARE PERPETRATED BY LOOSELY ORGANIZED BANDS OF SELF-STYLED LEFTIST EXTREMISTS YOUTHS WHO DESTROY STORES AND BUSINESSES IN A SENSELESS PROTEST OF THE "HAVE-NOTS" AGAINST THE HAVES."

7. COMMENT. THE PUBLIC ORDER SITUATION DEMANDS A PORTION OF THE ATTENTION AND ENERGIES OF THE GOVERNMENT WHICH MIGHT OTHERWISE GO TO THE RESOLUTION OF OTHER SOCIAL PROBLEMS. IN ADDITION, THE VIOLENCE HAS UNDERLINED THE NEED FOR ACTION FOR UNIVERSITY REFORM, POLICE AND JUDICIAL REFORM AND AGAINST YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT. UNFORTUNATELY, EACH ONE OF THESE REFORMS WOULD REQUIRE GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES WHICH MAY NOT BE POSSIBLE IN THE PRESENT CLIMATE OF AUSTERITY. DESPITE THE LIMITED RESOURCES AVAILABLE, THE GOVERNMENT HAS TAKEN CONCRETE STEPS WHICH, COUPLED WITH THE MORE EFFECTIVE POLICE WORK OF RECENT DAYS, WILL HELP IT REACT MORE EFFECTIVELY TO THE CHALLENGE OF VIOLENCE.BEAUDRY

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